

Message Text

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO DEFENSE FOR SECRETARY
BROWN AND ASD/ISA. USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS FOR
AMBASSADOR STRAUS-HUPE AND DEFAD.

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: UK, AWACS, NATO, OCON, MILI, GW
SUBJECT: AWACS -- SECRETARY MULLEY CALLS IN CHAROE

SUMMARY. CHARQE (ACCOMPANIED BY POL-MIL ATTACHE) WAS
CALLED IN BY MULLEY ON 17 MARCH TO DISCUSS AWACS. HE
ASKED US NOT TO TAKE NOTES AND TO TREAT CERTAIN ASNECTS
OF CONVERSATION AS "PRIVATE."

ONCE AGAIN NEED FOR AN ALLIANCE DECISION WAS UNDER-
SCORED AND MULLEY REAFFIRMED EMPHATICALLY HMG'S
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INABILITY TO POSTPONE OO NO-GO DECISION ON NIMROD
BEYOND END MARCH. END SUMMARY.

1. UPPERMOST RIGHT NOW IN MULLEY'S MIND IS HOW TO
HANDLE ISSUE OF NATO AEW IN COMMONS DURING FORTHCOMINO
22-23 MARCH NARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON DEFENSE WHITE
PAPER. THIS MUST BE PLAYED OUT AOAINST BACKDROO OF
FORTHCOMING SPECIAL DEFENSE MINISTERS MEETING ON NA/TO
AEW AND EXPECTATION AMONG PARLIAMENTARIANS THAT NO
DECISION FOR AWACS WILL BE AGREED. AS MULLEY SEES IT,

THE GOVERNMENT CAN EXPECT TO BE PUSHED INTO A "DIFFICULT CORNER" BY CONSERVATIVES WHO ARE UNITED IN SUPPORT FOR NIMROD. (HOWEVER, THERE ARE OTHERS WHO ALSO WILL GIVE SUPPORT TO NIMROD -- MANY SITTING ON THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN BACKBENCHES.) UK LABOR UNIONS AND AEROSPACE INDUSTRY HAVE JOINED HANDS IN SUPPORT OF NIMROD AND MULLEY FEARS A CONSERVATIVE DRIVE IN COMMONS DEMANDING CATEGORIC ASSURANCE THAT GOVERNMENT WILL SUPPORT NIMROD. UNFORTUNATELY, ISSUE OF SUPPORTING A NATO AEW PROGRAM HAS BECOME ONE OF "GOING-AMERICAN" VERSUS "BUYING BRITISH" -- AND THIS HAS POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE KIND.

2. THE DEFENSE AND OVERSEAS POLICY COMMITTEE (DOPC) IS SCHEDULED TO MEET ON MARCH 23 TO SET FINAL TOUCHES ON UK POSITION FOR BRUSSELS MEETING. MULLEY ASKS AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF LONG AND CLOSE BILATERAL CONSULTATION -- AND UK SUPPORT FOR AWACS -- FOR AS FULL A REPORT AS WASHINGTON CAN GIVE ON BILATERAL FRG-/US NATO AEW TALKS TO ENABLE HIM TO BRIEF DOPC AND CABINET. HE WANTS TO GO TO CABINET WITH FULL AND UNRESERVED DOPC BACKING. IF GOVERNMENT IS TO SPILL BLOOD OVER THIS ISSUE IT WANTS FIRST TO HEAR US ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY PLAY AND OUTCOME OF 25 MARCH MEETING IN LIGHT OF /US-FRG BILATERAL TALKS. MULLEY INTIMATED WILLINGNESS TO TRY AND PRY SOME FURTHER STRETCH IN UK POSITION IF HE CAN NET SECRET

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SOMETHING TANGIBLE AND SPECIFIC TO WORK ON. HE EMPHASIZED THAT CALLAGHAN'S PERSONAL BIAS FOR A LONG TIME HAS BEEN PRO-NIMROD REPEAT PRO-NIMROD. MULLEY SAID PM TOLD SCHMIDT DURING LONDON TALKS THAT HIS PERSONAL PREJUDICE FAVORED NIMROD.

3. COMMENT: MULLEY NOW FINDS HIMSELF WITHIN CABINET AND PARTY IN A MUCH MORE DIFFICULT AND UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION VIS-A-VIS AEW THAN WHEN HE SUCCEEDED MASON AND EARLY GAVE HIS PERSONAL BACKING FOR AWACS. A WELL-ORCHESTRATED LABOR UNIONS/INDUSTRY COALITION HAS VERY SUCCESSFULLY EXPLOITED THE LONG PERIOD OF NATO INDECISION ON AEW TO GIVE REAL CLOUT TO OPPOSITIONS OF THE "SUPPORT UK TECHNOLOGY" THROUGH "BUY BRITISH" LOBBY. ADDITIONALLY, MULLEY MUST NOW CONTEND WITH THE IMPLICATIONS OF DISTANTLY RELATED ISSUES (THE GENERALLY DEPRESSING ECONOMIC SITUATION, THE DEADLOCK OVER DEVOLUTION, THE FORTHCOMING CUTS IN PUBLIC EXPENDITURE TOGETHER WITH THE PERSISTENTLY HIGH LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT, ET CETERA) IN HIS EFFORTS TO HOLD SUPPORT FOR AWACS BY A GOVERNMENT UNCERTAIN OF ITS POLITICAL STRENGTH AND WITH EVERY DESIRE TO AVOID UNNECESSARY TESTING OF IT.

4. WITH THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER DEBATE SCHEDULED JUST BEFORE THE SPECIAL BRUSSELS MEETING AND BELIEVING THAT HIS SUPPORT FOR AWACS WILL COME UNDER HEAVY ATTACK FROM ALMOST ALL QUARTERS (AND FEELING OBLIVIOUS IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES TO GIVE MORE THAN JUST A CURSORY ANSWER TO THOSE ATTACKING NATO AEW), MULLEY WITHOUT QUESTION IS SEEKING ASSURANCE FROM THE US THAT WE HAVE A REALISTIC APPRAISAL AND A REAL FEELING OF CONFIDENCE WE CAN PULL TOGETHER A NATO AWACS PROGRAM. THE HOPE IS WE WILL GET A GREEN RATHER THAN AN AMBER LIGHT ON 25 MARCH.

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5. IF WE CAN CONVEY A SENSE OF OUR OWN CONFIDENCE TO HMG THEN THE GOVERNMENT'S TACTICS BETWEEN NOW AND THE END OF THE MONTH ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL BE TO PRESENT A SOLID FRONT OF SUPPORT FOR NATO AWACS. OTHERWISE IT WILL SIMPLY TRY TO FUDGE THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS IN COMMONS AND BY SO DOING SIGNAL ITS BELIEF THAT NATO AWACS IS NOT ON -- A MESSAGE WHICH WILL BE CLEARLY SEEN BY ALL THE OTHER ALLIES. ALMOST CERTAINLY THIS WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE BRUSSELS MEETING. IN SHORT, WE BELIEVE MULLEY SEES HIS IMMEDIATE BROAD OPTIONS AS (A) GIVING CONTINUED DECLARATORY SUPPORT IN COMMONS FOR NATO AWACS -- BUT RESISTING BEING DRAWN INTO GIVING DETAILS (UNDER THE PRETEXT OF WAITING FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE MARCH 25 MEETING); (B) USING COMMONS DEFENSE DEBATE AS A PLATFORM FOR ENJOYING POSITIVELY AND HEAD-ON ISSUES SUCH AS MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION/ COLLABORATIONS, AWACS AS AN ELEMENT IN NATO STANDARDIZATION, SPECIALIZATION, ET CETERA. THE GOVERNMENT'S THRUST WOULD BE AIMED AT DEFUSING PUSH FOR NIMROD BY ARGUING IMPORTANCE AND BENEFIT TO NATO OF BROADER GAINS FOR ALLIANCE COHESIVENESS/SOLIDARITY, ET CETERA, TO BE GARNERED BY A COLLECTIVE DECISION TO SUPPORT NATO AWACS; OR (C) TAKING AN APPROACH DESIGNED TO LIMIT "DAMAGE" TO GOVERNMENT BY PUBLICLY ACCEPTING NOW THAT THE LIKELIHOOD OF A PRO-AWACS DECISION IS SMALL. THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD OF SUPPORT FOR A COLLECTIVE NATO DECISION WOULD BE SHOWN TO BE SO WELL ESTABLISHED THE UK IS JUSTIFIED IN ANNOUNCING, DURING THE DEFENSE DEBATE ITSELF, THAT NIMROD APPEARS TO BE THE LIKELY OUTCOME FOR BRITAIN OF THE 25 MARCH DISCUSSIONS. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD STRESS THAT NIMROD WOULD BE MADE INTER-OPERABLE WITH OUR E-3A AND/OR E-2C AEW AIRCRAFT AND THAT UK IS DEDICATING NIMROD AEW TO NATO. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD GET A GOOD PAT ON THE BACK AND STRONG POPULAR SUPPORT IF IT TOOK THIS TACK.

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6. THE PRESENT INCLINATION IS OPTION (A); MANY POLITICIANS, TRADE UNIONISTS AND INDUSTRIALISTS WOULD BE RELIEVED IF THE GOVERNMENT WENT FOR OPTION (C). FROM THE US PERSPECTIVE, OPTION (B) IS MUCH TO BE PREFERRED -- BUT WE ARE UNLIKELY TO INDUCE IT UNLESS WE CAN CONVINCE LONDON THAT OUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS IN BRINGING ALONG THE OTHER ALLIES ON 25 MARCH ARE GOOD.

7. TO AT LEAST DETER THE BRITISH FROM THE STRONG TEMPTATION NOW TO TAKE OPTION (C), WE RECOMMEND THAT MULLEN BE GIVEN, ASAP, AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE OF THE REAL STATE OF PLAY AS WE GAUGE IT. /UK MOD VIEW IS WE DO NOT HAVE TO SELL AWACS TO THEM SINCE THEY HAVE LONG BEEN PERSUADED, BUT TO KEEP POLITICAL SUPPORT ALIVE WE SHOULD ENGAGE BRITISH AS IF THEY ARE OUR PARTNERS IN SUPPORT OF NATO AEW. THE DANGER WE RUN BY LETTING THE GOVERNMENT PUT ON A HALF-HEARTED OPTION (A) TYPE PERFORMANCE -- JUST BEFORE SO CRITICAL A MEETING AS THE 25 MARCH GATHERING -- IS THAT IT MAY WELL LEAD TO OPTION (C) IN ANY CASE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF WE ARE OURSELVES CONVINCED THAT NATO AWACS IS NOT ON, AT LEAST FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, WE MAY GET SOME POLITICAL "GAINS" BY LETTING UK OFF THE HOOK EARLY ENOUGH TO SAVE THE GOVERNMENT FROM ENOACHING IN WHAT COULD TURN OUT TO BE A RATHER COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE AND DIVISIVE SUB-DEBATE WITHIN THE DEFENSE DEBATE ON WHETHER, FOR EXAMPLE, THE UK (OR EUROPE) IS HEADED TO BECOMING AN INDUSTRIAL SATELLITE OF THE US AND OF LOSING ITS HIGH-TECHNOLOGY SKILLS. (CALLAGHAN WAS ASKED SUCH A QUESTION IN COMMONS ON HIS RETURN FROM VISITING PRESIDENT CARTER AND THE PM REPLIED, "... I HAVE STRONG VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT. ... I HAVE NO DESIRE TO SEE THIS COUNTRY (UK) BECOME AN INDUSTRIAL SATELLITE OF THE US. ESPECIALLY IN REGARD TO OUR MARITIME PROTECTION, WE SHOULD, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, ALTHOUGH BY ALL MEANS IN SECRET

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PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR ALLIES, BE ABLE TO LOOK AFTER OURSELVES." MULLEN SPECIFICALLY BROUGHT THIS ANSWER TO OUR ATTENTION, REMARKING THAT IT REFLECTED SOME ASPECT OF THE DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING HIM.)

8. OF ONE THING WE ARE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN: THE MOORE AT ALMOST EVERY LEVEL WOULD FIND RELIEF IF CIRCUMSTANCES BROUGHT OPTION (C) TO THE FORE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE BRITISH ARE GOOD TEAM PLAYERS AND THE GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO TAKE THE FLACK OF STAYING IN OUR CORNER AT LEAST UNTIL THE END OF THE MONTH. MULLEN HAS INDICATED HMG WILL REFUTE VIGOROUSLY ANY IMPUTATION

THAT IT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR FORCING AN IMPOSSIBLE TIME
CONSTRAINT ON NATO -- AND THEREBY BRINGING DOWN AWACS.

9. BRITISH ARE FEARFUL THAT MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS COULD
DO MORE DAMAGE TO ALLIANCE THAN ACCEPTANCE NOW OF
SHELVING NATO AWACS UNLESS WE ARE CERTAIN OF A SUCCESS-
FUL OUTCOME. THEY ARGUE THAT IN AEW CONTEXT AN INTER-
OPERABLE US-UK AWACS-NIMROD SYSTEM MAY NOT BE SUCH A
BAD "FALL BACK" SOLUTION AFTER ALL.

10. IT IS CLEAR TO US THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS A TROUBLED
POLITICAL PROBLEM AND ONE WHICH IN THE TEST OF CIRCUM-
STANCES IT MAY NOT WIN. THE QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER
WE ARE WILLING FRANKLY TO LAY OUT THE US ASSESSMENT OF
THE NATO AWACS SITUATION TO THE BRITISH BEFORE THE
DEFENSE DEBATE BEGINS ON 22 MARCH. WE RECOMMEND THAT
WASHINGTON GIVE CONSIDERATION TO THE POINTS RAISED BY
MULLEY AND THE DECISION TO WHICH WE NOW MAY WISH TO LEAN OR
NOT LEAN ON HMG TO HOLD FAST.

11. ACTION REQUESTED: WASHINGTON GUIDANCE ON HOW TO
RESPOND TO THE MULLEY OLEA ASAP.

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